



UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage

# Traditional Ainu Dance

Lake Akan Ainu Theater

# IKOR

# Inau: A Kamuy and a Prayer

Depending on the region in Hokkaido, traditional Ainu dances vary greatly in terms of the dances themselves and their accompanying songs. Even the same song or dance will have a different rhythm or choreography depending on the performer. To help people more deeply understand these traditional dances (which have been passed down over innumerable generations), at the Lake Akan Ainu Theater <Ikor>, traditional dance is performed by Ainu who take an inau as their motif. An inau is a wooden ritual tool that the kamuy (gods) taught the Ainu how to make. An Inau itself is a kamuy. It is held aloft as an offering when a kamuy has appeared in an area. And it is also a gift that Ainu send to the kamuy world. An Inau's most important roles are to connect Ainu and kamuy and to be an intermediary to assist communication between Ainu and kamuy. People tend to not be so good at conveying their true feelings. And to make up for that shortcoming, the Ainu use inau, songs, dances, and prayers. Many kamuy exist in this world in which we all live. The kamuy that are most cherished by the Ainu of Lake Akan are those that represent the most familiar of things: fire, water, earth, wind, and the sun. This performance of songs, dances, and prayers orbits around these five kamuy and inau.



## Stories



### Fire Inau / Kamuynomi

Kamuynomi is an Ainu ritual in which prayers are recited to kamuy and devotions are made. First of all, a prayer is made to the fire god, Apefuchi Kamuy. This kamuy is believed to be a messenger that communicates between the Ainu and other gods. It is enshrined in the open hearth of Ainu chise (house) and called a "ape inau".



### Water Inau / Tonotosoroba

Tonoto is rice wine that is used in Kamuynomi rituals. Akin to only men being allowed to craft and touch inau, tonoto is a sacred rice wine that only Ainu women are permitted to make. When fuchi (Ainu women elders) make tonoto, they sing.



### Earth Inau / Bumper-crop Dance

The bumper-crop dance is a dance with a song that is performed in the hope that sown seeds will grow into bountiful crops. Ainu men went into the mountains and rivers mainly to hunt, while women collected plants in the woods. The women took only what they needed (be it mushrooms, edible wild plants, or other such edibles in nature) and shared it with everyone in their kotan (village). That spirit of sharing remains in the Ainu community.



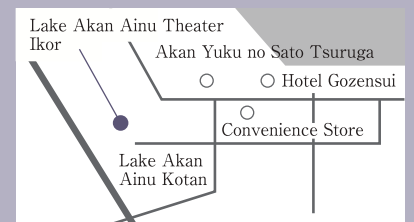
### Wind Inau / Mukkuri & Crane Dance

A mukkuri ("mouth harp" in English) is a musical instrument that is made with a notched piece of bamboo. It is played by holding it to the mouth and creating vibrations within the mouth. Ainu use this instrument to express the sounds of nature, such as the wind and waves. The crane dance is a dance regularly performed at Lake Akan, and it represents the numerous cranes living in the surrounding Kushiro region flying on the wind.



### Sun Inau / Chipkamuyho & Ring Dance

The sun is permanent, always there watching over us in the day. That is unless there is a solar eclipse. When anxious about an eclipse, the Ainu sing the song "chipkamuyho". The ring dance (or dance contest) is danced after a feast's in which everyone makes a ring and sings and dances until they are well and truly spent.



## Venue

Lake Akan Ainu Theater "Ikor"

4-7-84, Akanko Onsen,  
Akan-cho, Kushiro-shi,  
Hokkaido, Japan

[www.akanainu.jp/tr-dance](http://www.akanainu.jp/tr-dance)

